



The Sixty-fourth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,555th Concert

The Howard University Choir
J. Weldon Norris, *music director and conductor*

*Honoring the seventy-seventh anniversary of
the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

January 15, 2006
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Four Songs, op. 17

For female chorus, harp, and two French horns

Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang (The Harp Resounds with Wild Refrain)

Lied von Shakespeare (Song from *Twelfth Night*)

Der Gärtner (The Gardener)

Gesang aus Fingal (Song from Fingal)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Festgesang an die Künstler (Festival Song in Honor of Artists)

For male chorus and solo male quartet, accompanied

INTERMISSION

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

A Serenade to Music

For sixteen solo voices, unaccompanied

Ballet music for *Revelations*, arranged by Howard A. Roberts

Selections for accompanied mixed chorus and soloists

Shelton Becton, featured guest soloist

From Part 1: Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow

I've Been 'buked

Fix Me, Jesus

From Part 2: Take Me to the Water

Honor, Honor

Wade in the Water

I Wanna Be Ready

From Part 3: Move, Members, Move

The Day Is Past and Gone

God a-Mighty

Rock-a-My Soul

The Musicians

THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY CHOIR

Resident choir of one of the nation's preeminent African American universities, the Howard University Choir ranks among the finest choral groups in the United States. The ensemble attained this national distinction under the leadership of its former conductor, the late Dr. Warner Lawson. Since the appointment of Dr. J. Weldon Norris as its conductor in 1973, the choir has expanded its focus, singing in international choral festivals in Kraków, Rome, Toronto, Tokyo, and Valencia, Spain. The group has been critically acclaimed for its performances of choral works by J. S. Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Poulenc, and Rachmaninoff. True to its singular legacy, the Howard University Choir has become the definitive interpreter of Negro spirituals and work songs as well as choral works by composers of African descent. A recent review in the *Washington Post* described the choir's performance of spirituals as "mesmerizingly beautiful."

Recent honors for the choir include providing the choral music for the funeral of the late Ossie Davis (February 2005) at the Riverside Church in New York City and performing for the fifth time at the Kennedy Center Honors Gala (December 2004). In 1999–2000 the ensemble appeared on "Good Morning America" and the "Las Vegas Vocal Extravaganza in Black." That busy season also included a tour of Switzerland and Germany with the Chicago Sinfonietta and participation in the Festival des Artes Nègres in Libreville, Gabon. In 1998 the choir was invited to Venezuela for a choral festival at the University of Caracas, and in 1997 the group sang in Nizhny Novgorod and Amaras, Russia, in Belfort, France, and in the chapel of Oxford University's Balliol College.

Leaders and staff of the Howard University Choir are:

Tia Edwards-Brock and Renée Harris, soprano section leaders

Chelsea Young, alto section leader

Clifton Ross, tenor section leader

Gregory Watkins, bass section leader

Andrea Hogan, student administrative assistant

Joseph Smith, student librarian and general manager

André Briscoe, assistant to the conductor

Gregory Watkins, student conductor

David Lang, accompanist

J. Weldon Norris, music director and conductor

The following musicians are assisting the choir in this performance:

Max Cripe and Mark Questad, French horn

Suzanne Robinson, harp

Gregory Watkins, piano

John Pollard, bass guitar

Dianne Grainger, set drums

Joel Holmes, conga drums

Russell Carter, bongo drums

J. WELDON NORRIS

A native of South Carolina, J. Weldon Norris graduated from South Carolina State College in 1955, having earned a bachelor of science degree in chemistry and biology. After a tour of duty as a commissioned officer in the United States Army Reserve, Norris matriculated at Howard University, earning the bachelor and master of music degrees in 1959 and 1960, respectively. At Howard, Norris studied with Professors Vada E. Butcher, Evelyn White, Warner Lawson, and Mark Fax. From 1969 to 1973 he served as director of choral activities, chairman of the department of humanities, and acting academic dean at Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina. In

1975 he culminated a Ford Foundation Fellowship by earning a doctor of music degree from the School of Music at Indiana University, where his teachers were Julius Herford, Fiora Contino, and Hugh Johnson.

Norris was appointed director of choral activities and professor of music at Howard University in 1973. He pursued postdoctoral studies at the International Bach Academy in Stuttgart and at the International Haydn Congress in Austria and Hungary. He has also studied with the eminent choral conductors Robert Shaw and Eric Ericson. A published arranger and scholar of Negro spirituals, Norris was asked in 1986 to deliver lectures on that genre in Germany at the Amerika-Schule and the Amerika-Haus in Hamburg and at the University of Göttingen. He also gave lectures on this theme in connection with the Howard University Choir's performances in Kraków, Caracas, and Valencia.

In addition to his busy schedule of performances with the Howard University Choir, Norris often serves as an adjudicator and guest conductor at choral festivals. He recently appeared as a commentator for the BBC in films on the lives of Al Green and Jessye Norman. He has served on the educational and choral panels for the National Endowment for the Arts, the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and the Maryland Commission on the Arts.

Program Notes

Music, especially singing, held particular importance in the life of Martin Luther King Jr., who was born on January 15, 1929. The hymns and spirituals that he learned as a child in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, were essential threads in the fabric of his philosophy, his strength of purpose, and his stirring oratory. In its artistic excellence and dedication to the definitive interpretation of spirituals, the Howard University Choir pays implicit tribute to Martin Luther King whenever it sings. The National Gallery is honored to be presenting the Howard University Choir in this explicit tribute to that great champion of civil rights.

Although Johannes Brahms is best known for his profound and serious choral works, such as his *Schicksalslied* (Song of Fate) and *The German Requiem*, the great composer wrote many part songs on secular texts, intended for performance by a quartet or other vocal chamber group. One of the innovations of the nineteenth century, when it became commonplace for women to sing in public, was the formation of choirs of women's voices. Brahms founded and directed such an ensemble early in his career and wrote a considerable number of works for it, including *Four Songs*, op. 17, *Three Sacred Choruses*, op. 37, and *Twelve Songs and Romances*, op. 44.

Mendelssohn composed several choral works for festive occasions, including a setting of Friedrich Schiller's *An die Künstler*, written in 1846 for a men's chorus in the city of Cologne. Mendelssohn was drawn to poetry that dealt with romantic themes, such as springtime, forests, and wandering. He was deeply influenced by the writings of Shakespeare, Goethe, and the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), the latter being a personal acquaintance. From them, Mendelssohn garnered ideas about the independence of musical form and the importance of the classical tradition. He was the first major composer to organize “historical” concerts, in which the aim was to introduce listeners to the music of earlier times. In the course of those concerts, he conducted (and trained choirs to sing) works by Handel, Haydn, Cimarosa, Mozart, and Salieri that had been forgotten by the public and most fellow musicians.

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote his *Serenade to Music* in 1938 as a tribute to the revered British conductor Sir Henry Wood (1869–1944) on the occasion of his golden jubilee as a conductor. After shocking the musical world with his dissonant *Fourth Symphony*, Vaughan Williams gradually reverted to a more traditional style. His music of the late 1930s and the years of the Second World War is reassuring and euphonious, conveying a sense of spiritual security. The harmonic language is modal and diatonic, with occasional contrary

elements providing variety and interest. The text for the *Serenade* is a conversation among four of the characters in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, who share their thoughts on music as they pause in a nighttime journey.

The ballet *Revelations* was a favorite of the late African American choreographer Alvin Ailey. The music for the ballet was arranged by Howard A. Roberts, a professor of music at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York City. Earlier in his career Roberts had served on the faculties of North Carolina Central and Morgan State Universities. A jazz trumpeter as well as a singer, he was the first African American tenor to be accepted into the famed Robert Shaw Chorale. Roberts also composed and arranged for the Boys Choir of Harlem and founded and conducted his own choral group, the Howard Roberts Singers.

Revelations consists of three parts, designed to portray the religious convictions of African Americans as they would have been celebrated in the black churches of the southern United States in the nineteenth century. The first part, "Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow," bemoans the people's trials and tribulations but always maintains the strong conviction that things will change for the better. The second part, "Take Me to the Water," declares salvation through baptism. "Move, Members, Move," probably the most popular section of the ballet, takes the listener to a revival meeting in the heat of an August evening. After greeting each other, the church members listen to a fiery sermon, after which the meeting turns into a shouting jubilee. Roberts's music includes arrangements of the music of other outstanding composers, including James Miller and Hall Johnson.

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry after 6:30 pm
is not permitted.

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